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Editorial: In politics, cash talks

We're 19 months away from the nearest presidential election, but we've already seen the horse race to replace President Barack Obama begin in earnest. And there's only one reason we have to start thinking about it this soon: money.

In politics, cash rules all. Candidates are forced to cater their message to appease the whims of a wealthy few instead of the best interests of the public. And on the Democratic side of the aisle, it means Hillary Clinton has no meaningful competition. She is all but inevitable, it seems. In fact, she's looking to break records with the amount of her fundraising.

"This campaign will begin on a small scale and build up to an effort likely to cost more than any presidential bid waged before, with Clinton's supporters and outside 'super PACs' looking to raise as much as \$2.5 billion in a blitz of donations from Democrats who overwhelmingly support her candidacy," reported Amy Chozick of The New York Times April 12.

But competition is healthy. Whomever Republicans select to face Clinton in the general election will be polished, scrappy and ready for the fight. By contrast, Clinton will be vulnerable — soft from months and months of unopposed fundraising and campaigning.

Even locally, this disparity between candidates is staggering. Incumbent Democratic Mayor Greg Goodnight has no meaningful competition in the fundraising department.

“Goodnight, campaigning for his third term, currently has \$398,954 in cash on hand and investments, \$392,939 of which was carried over into the New Year,” the Tribune’s George Myers reported Tuesday. “[Republican Jack] Dodd, who announced his candidacy on Nov. 14, came into 2015 without any campaign funds but has since raised \$12,727 and spent \$9,823, leaving his committee with \$2,904. ... [Martha] Lake, Dodd’s Republican primary challenger and current Howard County auditor, has raised \$11,812 and spent \$8,976 since Jan. 1, leaving her political committee with \$2,835 in cash on hand and investments.”

If we want any semblance of democracy to make a return, we have to figure out a way to significantly reduce the amount of money being injected into our political races. This is the game politicians believe they must play in order to remain competitive. Our current state of affairs, both locally and nationally, means years of continued, endless fundraising as elections grow ever costlier.

Ideas should rule, not checkbooks.